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RUEHWR/AMEMBASSY WARSAW 0405  
RUEHCD/AMCONSUL CIUDAD JUAREZ 0406  
RUEHOS/AMCONSUL LAGOS 7258  
RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC  
RHEBAAA/DEPT OF ENERGY WASHINGTON DC  
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC  
RUEHC/DEPT OF LABOR WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHINGTON DC  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ABUJA 001366

SIPDIS

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DEPT FOR DRL, AF/W  
PLEASE PASS USTR FOR AGAMA  
DOL FOR SUDHA HALEY  
DOE FOR CAROLYN GAY  
DOC FOR 3317/ITA/OA/KBURRESS  
TREASURY FOR DAN PETERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/09/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [ELAB](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ENRG](#) [NI](#)

SUBJECT: NIGERIA: 2007 STRIKE INDICATIVE OF NEW PARADIGM?

REF: A. ABUJA 1342  
    1B. ABUJA 1326  
    1C. ABUJA 1319  
    1D. ABUJA 1317  
    1E. ABUJA 1303  
    1F. ABUJA 1302  
    1G. ABUJA 1294  
    1H. ABUJA 1278  
    1I. ABUJA 1155

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Classified By: Ambassador John Campbell for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

1. (C) SUMMARY. The 2007 national labor strike (reftels) differed in some significant ways from other Nigerian national labor strikes. In particular, the 2007 strike was well-managed within the labor movement, was non-violent and resulted in a win-win agreement between the government and the labor federations in which neither side feels aggrieved. Several factors converged to make this strike different -- a new (and truly civilian) president, a strong sense of unity and cooperation between the labor federations, and a sense of public frustration following the 2007 elections which needed a release valve. As a result, the outlook for the GON/labor relationship and for the labor movement internally appears to be a good one headed into the initial months of the Yar'adua presidency. The strike may have, in a single event, served to consolidate labor unity, enabling the federations and their member unions to begin to overcome the obstacles to labor's influence erected by former President Obasanjo. Whether the handling of the strike represents a paradigm shift in Nigerian governance and a "servant-leader" role for the presidency remains to be seen; however, the initial indications are positive for the labor movement. END SUMMARY.

2007 STRIKE - A HORSE OF A DIFFERENT COLOR

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12. (C) According to Nigeria Labor Congress (NLC) General Secretary John Odah, participation in the 2007 strike was higher than in other previous national strikes. Post believes the high level of participation is likely due to two important factors which converged in this strike. Firstly, the NLC and its sister federation the Trade Union Congress (TUC), under the new leadership of Abdulwaheed Omar and Peter Esele, respectively, have worked to promote cooperation and unity between the two federations. While it seems there are areas of clear confluence of interest between the two federations, the predominantly blue-collar NLC and white-collar TUC have not historically coordinated their activities well. The 2007 May Day celebrations across Nigeria were actually the first time the two federations coordinated May Day activities. The second important factor influencing participation is the level of frustration felt by the general populace following the 2007 elections. The strike provided a peaceful avenue for venting frustration with the former Obasanjo administration, focusing, in particular, on Obasanjo's decision to raise fuel prices in the last days of his term.

13. (C) Another significant difference between the 2007 strike and previous national strikes was the virtually complete lack of violence associated with the 2007 strike. Solidarity Center Assistant Country Program Director Benedict Edherue told Poloff the strike occurred without violence because Yar'adua reacted differently than Obasanjo and the other military presidents have reacted in the past. Edherue pointed out that previous presidents (both military and Obasanjo in his later revival as a civilian leader) ordered security force involvement early in the strike. The involvement of security forces upped the ante and peaceful gatherings quickly escalated -- with tear gassing quickly turning to violent reprisals from both sides. He maintains that Yar'adua's inauguration marked the true beginning of the

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Nigerian transition from military to civilian rule.

14. (C) This different leadership style is the crux of the third major difference between the 2007 strike and previous strikes. The 2007 strike ended in a win-win agreement in which neither side left the table with ill feelings or bile. NLC Secretary General John Odah contrasted Yar'adua and Obasanjo's styles in dealing with labor negotiations in a meeting with Poloff on June 26. He pointed to Obasanjo's call to TUC President Esele on May 25, simply telling him to call off the strike (Ref. I) and contrasted that with Yar'adua's involvement in the last day of negotiations -- which he solely credited with resolving the deadlock. Odah described Yar'adua's style as more egalitarian, recognizing the interests of the labor representatives at the table. Obasanjo, on the other hand, he noted, asserted his authority over the situation by belittling those across the table and pronouncing the terms of the agreement.

#### IMPACT OF THE STRIKE - LOOKING FORWARD

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15. (C) Within the Nigerian labor movement, the strike may prove to be among the more significant unifying and empowering events since independence. The strength drawn from the unified front of the NLC and TUC in this strike has demonstrated the potential to begin to overcome obstacles to labor's influence erected by Obasanjo in his military and later his civilian terms. During Obasanjo's military term, he devised the current dual system of trade unions, with employees split into predominantly white-collar or blue-collar unions. With two unions, two sets of management, and two sometimes competing sets of priorities, the system undermined the strength of unions in any given industry. During his civilian administration, the 2005 Trade Union Amendment Act removed NLC as the single, mandated trade union federation. With TUC now representing white-collar unions and NLC representing blue-collar, the former national

influence of the NLC seemed lost. In addition, the 2005 Act prohibited strikes over "matters of national economic policy," such as the fuel price. The cohesion of the NLC and TUC in the 2007 strike, as well as the decision by the government to allow a national strike over petroleum pricing (a clear national economic policy matter), may well mark a new emergence of labor as a political force in Nigerian politics.

¶6. (C) NLC's John Odah was hopeful that the strike and its resolution mark the beginning of a new relationship between the GON and labor. Though his comments to Poloff regarding the outlook for labor's relationship with Secretary of the Government Babagana Kingibe were less than encouraging, he was hopeful for a strong relationship with Yar'adua and the new National Assembly. (NOTE: Odah told Poloff that Kingibe is "well-informed," but at the same time cautioned that labor will "have to be on its guard in dealing with him.") Odah noted positive engagement by new Senate President David Mark and Speaker of the House Patricia Etteh, who visited labor with a group of Senators and Congressmen to urge dialog and compromise. Odah was hopeful that much of the old game-playing may be coming to an end. He described Yar'adua as "not playing to the gallery" and "wanting to carve a niche for himself."

¶7. (C) COMMENT. Yar'adua has billed himself as a "servant-leader" and spoken publicly about a new leadership style for Nigeria. Whether the handling of the 2007 strike is indicative of just such a paradigm shift in the GON or not remains to be seen. With Yar'adua's cabinet still to be named, the attitude of the new Minister of Labor and others within the administration toward a potentially stronger labor/government relationship remains unclear. What is clear, however, is that the change in leadership in the

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presidency brought about a change in the conduct and outcome of this strike that few could have predicted in its early days. END COMMENT.  
CAMPBELL